



Études de stylistique anglaise

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Exception(s)

Foreword

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Foreword

Sandrine Sorlin

- 1 The theme retained this year for the annual workshop of the SSA (*Société de Stylistique Anglaise*) within the SAES (*Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur*) – « Exceptions » – was bound to be of interest to stylisticians: the exceptional use of a marker, the out-of-norm remarkable phrase, the exceptionally inventive figure of speech, i.e. all that escapes pre-conceived rules, fall within the concerns of stylistics about the norms and margins of a language. Embodying the “remainder” of language, what remains “unresolved”, exceptions are what still await a more encompassing theory that could account for them. But this “remainder” can be meaningful especially when it takes the form of small “agrammaticalities” (Deleuze 1989, Lecercle 2008) “figuring” a semantic and pragmatic supplement (Jenny 1990) or expressing what cannot be said otherwise. To take exception or to be the odd one out can be purposeful in literature/fiction as well as in politics and other genres: it can aim at denying imposed standards or established canons. In discourse analysis, a speech deviating from the generic norms that are supposed to support it is worth studying as it enables to spot out the markers of rupture with the generic norms and grasp what remains and what emerges, thus heralding a possible renewal of a genre.
- 2 All the articles that compose this issue tackle this notion of “exception” in relation to some “rules” in a wide array of corpora, genres and fields (literature, politics, journalism, recruitment films, comedies), exploiting the polysemy of the theme to highlight what really counts as exceptions and “exceptionalism” in relation to a preconstructed norm and what does not.
- 3 The first part focuses on what could be called rhetorics of exception or exceptionalism.
- 4 **Luc Benoît à la Guillaume** questions the exceptional nature of Donald Trump’s rhetoric marked by violence and lies. Basing his analysis on Bourdieu’s field theory, the author measures the gap between Trump’s discursive transgressions and the norm of political discourse, concluding on a long-term continuity rather than a complete rupture: Trump would indeed only be the symptom of a trend at work in the American political communication since the end of the 1960s. In the model proposed by L. Benoît à la Guillaume, Trump could be said to have switched from a status of « tribune »

(when he was still a mere candidate) to that of “official rebel” (from the elevated position that his election as president has granted him). Or rather he seems to be cultivating both at the same time to ensure his electorate’s loyalty. Less an exception that would prove the rule, the 45th president of the United States in fact reveals and exacerbates the crisis of political representation that has affected numerous democracies.

- 5 **Stéphanie Bonnefille** proposes a case study of Trump’s confrontational rhetorical in her dissection of a one-minute long video extracted from a two-hour speech given by Trump in 2019 at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference where he sarcastically ridicules the Green New Deal as submitted by left-wing Democrat representative, Ocasio-Cortez. Taking a theoretical approach that pertains to classical rhetoric as well as cognitive linguistics, S. Bonnefille interrogates the end of “storytelling” that has, according to Salmon (2019), supposedly given way to some “clash”-seeking technique in the case of Trump. The author argues for a combination of strategies rather than the abandon of one in favour of the other, giving a detailed analysis of the pragmatic aspects (through the violent use of irony and sarcasm), the prosody of Trump’s syntax, the functions of the numerous repetitions as well as of the fake apostrophe to his wife all in the aim of getting his audience to laugh at the climate change theory. Trump is shown to embody a paroxysmal version of the “strict father model” indulging in the public humiliation of the supporters of the Green New Deal.
- 6 **Caroline Benedetto** is interested in the construction of “exceptionalism” in the recruitment films broadcasted by the hospitals of the National Health Service (NHS) since 2000 against the backdrop of a vocation crisis. She highlights the stylistic and rhetorical techniques that are deployed to create the ethos of the health professionals, singling out heroic relational skills of the actors and the nobility of the job. C. Benedetto demonstrates how the media discourse of the institutions aims at glorifying and even mythologizing the relationship between the carers and the cared-for, making these “exceptional professionals” a source of exemplariness.
- 7 The second part is devoted to narratological conventions and innovations as regards focalisation, reported speech/thought or within transitional moments (the incipits of novels).
- 8 **Léa Boichard** and **Adeline Terry** centre their stylistic analysis on the *Harry Potter* saga, tracking the “narrauthor”’s manipulation of focalisation through the seven volumes written by J.K. Rowling from 1997 to 2007. They show that there are exceptions to the general pattern of the hetero-extradiegetic narration (alternating with passages taking Harry as reflector) and further show that these exceptions are instrumental in both maintaining suspense and foreshowing the final plot twist. Indeed, using Deictic Shift Theory as exploited in cognitive stylistics, the authors first exemplify the systematic deictic “pushes” into Harry’s perception and “pops” out of it, highlighting how the narration can zoom in and out of the main centre of perception. This allows them to bring to the fore the exceptions to the pattern in volumes 1, 4, 6 and 7 where Harry is left out of the incipits – the salience is greater in volume 6 when the reappearance of the hero is postponed for a long time. L. Boichard and A. Terry demonstrate that these exceptions in focalisation serve as scattered clues for the reader to collect on her way to the final revelation.
- 9 **Florence Floquet** gives a fine-grained analysis of the multiple interior/interiorised “voices” in Stephen King’s horror novel, *The Shining* (1977). She first points out that the

different elements that inhabit consciousness could be analysed as “verbal” and thus be interpreted using the traditional techniques of reported speech ([Free] Direct Speech or Free indirect Speech) but progressively brings to the fore a more complex picture of the presentation of psychic life in the novel that requires a specific and unique pragmatic and linguistic treatment depending on the narratorial context and co-text. Indeed some elements that do not seem to be verbal are of some other nature that the article intends to pinpoint. These other “voices” take the form of reminiscences or of telepathy that F. Floquet calls “parasitic discourse” marked by a certain autonomy as they are not (willingly) reported (as opposed to “wilful inner speech”) but intrude the character’s mind. They seem to partake of the “consonant psycho-narration” (Cohn 1978) or “*récit à point de vue*” (Rabatel 2001), whereby non-verbal thoughts are attributed to a centre of conscience but never verbalised by the character. This is even clearer in the case of mental reactions captured in images (e.g. “(blood)”) as a pragmatic figuration of what emerges in the character’s mind, which F. Floquet points out, takes us completely out of reported speech.

- 10 **Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud** chooses to focus on incipits from the angle of “exception” to be understood as singularities that signal a transition moment serving as a trailer to short stories. Most often saturated with key details, they are the entry points through which the reader experiences the salience of a particular style. Its strategic position as threshold points to “text already there and text still to come”, inviting the reader *ex nihilo* and *ex abrupto* into the fictional narrative. The author takes as illustration two incipits by Joyce Carol Oates from the collection entitled *Heat* (1992) (“Heat” and “Sundays in Summer”) that she compares, highlighting their stylistic similarities, both saliently and poignantly narrating the deaths of young kids. The violence of the writing mirrors the tragedy of the drama, the traumatic incidents being expressed in an intensive, rhythmical style that offers a re-enactment of the trauma – a “haptic apparatus” that entraps the reader, leaving on her an indelible mark. The incipits, the author reveals, evoke sensory emotions to saturation point, quietly but cruelly foreshadowing the drama that is yet to come.
- 11 The third part more specifically zooms in on linguistic singularities and little agrammaticalities.
- 12 “Feel” and “feeling” are the verb and substantive on which **Stéphanie Béligon** concentrates her attention in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) for the high number of occurrences the novel contains. She exposes the semantic core of “feel” whose full scope is exploited in Woolf’s text, referring to sensations, affects but also cognition in all its forceful polysemy. “Feel” is shown to be a key component in *Mrs Dalloway* by means of which the text can be comprehended: the outer world and meaning are indeed given access to through sensations and feelings. Characters seem even to share feelings beyond their own individuality. Different patterns of emotions are highlighted depending on whether the perceiver and the perceived object are in contact or distinguished. The separation of the experiencer from the outside reality seems in the end to be what makes the emergence of meaning possible. Touch being an encompassing matrix, S. Béligon evinces that “feel” is linguistically commensurate with “the semi-transparent envelope” Woolf speaks of in her non-fictional essays, as both the membrane that allows contact and the shield protecting oneself from the outside world.

- 13 In her article devoted to the experimental work of the Korean American writer and visual artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982), **Marie-Agnès Gay** delves into the hybrid production of the writer marked by a nomadic juxtaposition of narrative and poetic passages, grammar and translation exercises, or black-and white photographs and diagrams, both in her autobiographical memoir *Dictée* and other selected works collected in *Exilée – Temps Morts – Selected Works* (2009). The author shows how the writer plays with the most constraining form of exercise (the *dictée*) through her knowledge of French. As a Korean female immigrant ‘dictated’ to learn foreign languages, she was aware of the ‘linguistic diktat’ and the necessity to undermine and subvert it, bringing ‘violence’ to the language to give free reign to what Lecercle calls “the remainder” that escapes all rules. Denouncing the political authority that is at the heart of a homogenized language (standard English), she uses the drills of repetition as a form of stylistic emancipation from the rigid coercive grammatical exercise, giving rise to a “truant language” sinning against the rule the better to regain empowerment, making the reader/speaker a decentered figure that she calls “diseaseuse”.
- 14 Lastly, the final part evokes exploitation of two different genres (the newspaper article and the comedy) to create exceptional empathy for a victim on the one hand or place victims in a position from which they can be laughed at on the other.
- 15 **Marie-Pierre Maechling**’s article, “‘Her Dreary Easter Day’, an exceptional newspaper article”, focuses on articles written by Susan Glaspell about the ongoing Hossack case, highlighting on what makes the one cited in her title particularly exceptional when it was published on April 9th, 1901 in the *Des Moines Daily News*, the largest daily in the state of Iowa in the early 1900s. This particular article stands out because it fails to fit the traditional news report (as modelled by Van Dijk 1986). M-P. Maechling gives a thorough analysis of the stylistic means Glaspell uses to build the image of Mrs Hossack – charged with the murder of her husband found dead in their bed – as a poor helpless victim that she subtly turns into the heroine of the on-going narrative around the case. Bringing to the fore the singular rhetoric that informs Glaspell’s whole article, Maechling shows how the author manages to hook the reader’s attention and construct the woman as somebody one should pity and empathise with.
- 16 In an article entitled “‘Killing ourselves laughing’ – Why we laugh anyway, even when we know we shouldn’t”, **Lynn Blin** explores the difficult question of what is and is not ethical in our laughter in reaction to racist, sexist, fascist, perverted humour or humiliating humour that makes fun of victims. She attempts to answer the question through the investigation of two case studies: the British series *The Office* (2001-2003) and the American humorist Louis C.K. She first reviews the literature of the main humour theories to date, showing where they are useful to spot the comical elements of the particular genres she studies (the stand-up and the sitcom), and then goes on to give a detailed and multimodal account of the techniques and mechanics behind the shows (focusing in particular on voice, gesture and silence as well as the involvement of the audience “on stage”), highlighting the complexity of what makes them funny in relation to where the performances situate the “other”. L. Blin concludes on the notion of “safety net” that is not needed as strongly for all members of the audience depending on their own personal history and their “laughter risk capital”. In any case, what seems to be needed for humour to remain ethically intact is “hindsight on pain suffered and inflicted”.

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